United Nations E/CN.6/2015/NGO/244

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
3 January 2015

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Fifty-ninth session
9-20 March 2015
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by World Young Women's Christian Association, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

14-66578 (E) 160115

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Statement

The commitment to gender equality in the post 2015 agenda is critical for sustainable development and yet is insufficient to address the broad range of rights that are defined in the Beijing Platform for Action. The World Young Women's Christian Association recognizes that the Beijing Platform for Action together with the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and United Nations Resolution 1325 provides a comprehensive women's human rights agenda that addresses issues of development, peace and security. For instance, there is inbuilt accountability mechanisms through the treaty bodies and the annual meetings of the Commission on the Status of Women, however there are still gaps.

We therefore call for a comprehensive recommitment to the Beijing Platform for Action together with any emerging issues as the foundational reference consensus document for women's empowerment and gender equality within the United Nations inter-governmental framework.

Across the spectrum, the national mechanism and institutions have often been so marginalized within the centres of power in governments and have been the least resourced, thus limiting their effectiveness in the substantive delivery of the mandate for women, advancing rights of women and reducing gender inequalities. The gender mainstreaming approach in the public sector did not go beyond awareness raising towards a real transformative agenda.

In terms of the 12 critical areas of concern, the World Young Women's Christian Association movement actively contributed to four main areas related to education and training; ending violence against women, and economic empowerment for women and women and health. As global faith based organisation we are women, young women and girls with our diversity of religion, culture, language, as survivors of violence, of trafficking, as women living with HIV, with disabilities and mental health issues, we are migrants, displaced, refugees, we are indigenous, urban and rural women, we are the World Young Women's Christian Association. It is in from this diverse foundation that the World Young Women's Christian Association provides an analysis and succinct recommendations on each of these key areas of concern:

Education and training

Significant progress has been made in the area of access to education especially for the girl child. However, this has not been accompanied by investment in quality education, gender sensitivity or ensuring that there is a sufficient transition for girls from primary education to secondary and tertiary education, as well as vocational and skills training. In addition, inadequate attention has been given to increasing accessibility to education for marginalized groups. Furthermore, insufficient resources have been made available for adult literacy, this has impacted mainly women who are unable read or write especially in resource poor communities. We call on the United Nations and Member States to:

- Prioritize and invest in quality, gender-responsive and universal accessible secondary, tertiary, vocational and non-formal education.
- Reduce digital divide and ensure equal access to technology and learning opportunities including mobile telephony.

- Provide comprehensive sexuality education for adolescent girls and young women in formal and non-formal settings and the allocation of budgets.
- Provide quality services for education for girls, especially those with disabilities, indigenous and marginalized communities and those in displacement.

Ending violence against women and girls and ensuring peace with justice

Violence against women remains the greatest violation of the rights of women in public and in private spheres, in peace times and in conflict situations. Despite the increase in awareness, women and girls continue to experience violence particularly domestic violence. There are limited resources to support survivors such as shelters and legal, psychosocial and counselling services; and the mental health impact of violence against women has often not been addressed. Human rights violations such as sexual violence and child, early and forced marriage continue to destroy lives. The World Young Women's Christian Association calls on the United Nations and Member States to:

- Step up interventions and programmes that focus on prevention of violence against women and girls, which include addressing the social and cultural norms that undervalue the role and status of women, and greater legal and human rights awareness.
- Address the underlying and pervasive impunity associated with violence against women and girls, whether in communities or in situations of conflict. Provide integrated and comprehensive support services to women survivors of violence, including adequate remedies and support for healing and recovery.
- Implement existing laws and ensure access to quality and affordable justice.
- Ensure economic empowerment initiatives; enabling women to have financial independence.
- Ensure women's effective participation in the peace negotiations, peacebuilding, recovery and reconstruction.
- End child, early and forced marriage within a single generation.

Economic empowerment for women

Women's economic independence and wellbeing is intricately linked with their ability to access, claim and enjoy other rights such as political participation, making choices in health, access to education and living a life free of violence. Many women, especially young women, lack access to decent employment, and when employed, still earn less than men for the same job, and lack agency over spending their own income. In many countries, women do not have access to, ownership and control over productive resources, thus limiting economic rights and opportunities for livelihoods. The economic crisis and the austerity measures leading to the decline of the social welfare system severely affects women; causing the level of unpaid care work to grow. We therefore call on the United Nations, Member States and the private sector to:

- Implement policies that advance gender equality and ensure women's effective participation in the economy, including decision-making in key sectors such as

finance and investment, industry, mining, technology, education, energy and trade.

- Implement laws that ensure women's access to, ownership of and control over resources such as family income, land, property, inheritance, technology and other intellectual property.
- Invest in and scale up the innovations of women in communities, including greater access to technology.
- Prioritize infrastructure development such as roads, communications, technology, green energy sources, water and sanitation for rural and marginalized communities, thereby creating economic opportunities for women, including through time-saving and labour-saving technologies.
- Support market women and cross-border traders through facilitative law, customs and migration policies, as well as insurance, safety and security.
- Scale up investment in and support young women and girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics as a strategy for the elimination of gender gaps in key sectors of the economy.

Women and health

The evidence from the Millennium Development Goals review and the International Conference on Populations and Development Beyond 2014 revealed that health is one of the key areas that has achieved least progress. The rate of preventable maternal deaths, especially in developing countries, is unacceptable. Women, especially young women remain at highest risk of HIV infection. Women's sexual and reproductive health and rights has lagged, particularly in the area of family planning. Adolescent health issues have not found sufficient attention despite the evidence of this age group being at high risk. The emerging health issues, like Ebola, have provided a sharp reminder of the role of women as caregivers and the importance of well-functioning, well-resourced and equipped health-care systems. The role of culture and faith in shaping social norms and transmitting knowledge and heath related values cannot be underestimated. The World Young Women's Christian Association therefore calls on the United Nations and Member States to:

- Ensure access to comprehensive sexuality education for adolescent girls and young women.
- Provide adequate sexual and reproductive health and rights information and services to all women, including family planning and contraceptive options.
- Scale up programmes for HIV prevention, treatment, care and support for women and girls, and especially reproductive health-care services for women living with HIV.
- Prioritize health-care systems, strengthen and ensure quality infrastructure, health-care workforce, communications and referral services that are age and gender responsive.
- Recognize and support women's care responsibility and volunteer services as an extension of the health-care service provision.

- Address the social determinants of health, including the underlying issues of social norms, faith and culture.
- Invest in non-communicable women's health issues such as cancer, mental health and diabetes.
- Provide special health-care services for women and young women with disabilities.

In conclusion, the World Young Women's Christian Association calls for a strong intergenerational approach to the implementation of the Beijing platform for action. As the World Young Women's Christian Association our faith affirms women's rights as human rights, and the new sustainable development agenda post 2015 must affirm and advance these rights. Sufficient resources must be committed to advancing this agenda.